

French's Acting Edition No. 1628

THE HOUSE WITH THE TWISTY WINDOWS

An Episode in One Act

by

MARY PAKINGTON

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An Episode in One Act

BY
MARY PAKINGTON

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SAMUEL FRENCH LIMITED

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MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BUTLER AND TANNER LTD, FROME AND LONDON
MADE IN ENGLAND

CHARACTERS

In the order of their appearance

JAMES ROPER, K.C.

CHARLIE CLIVE.

TERESA, LADY PONTING.

HEATHER SORRELL.

ANNE SORRELL.

DERRICK MOORE.

STEPAN.

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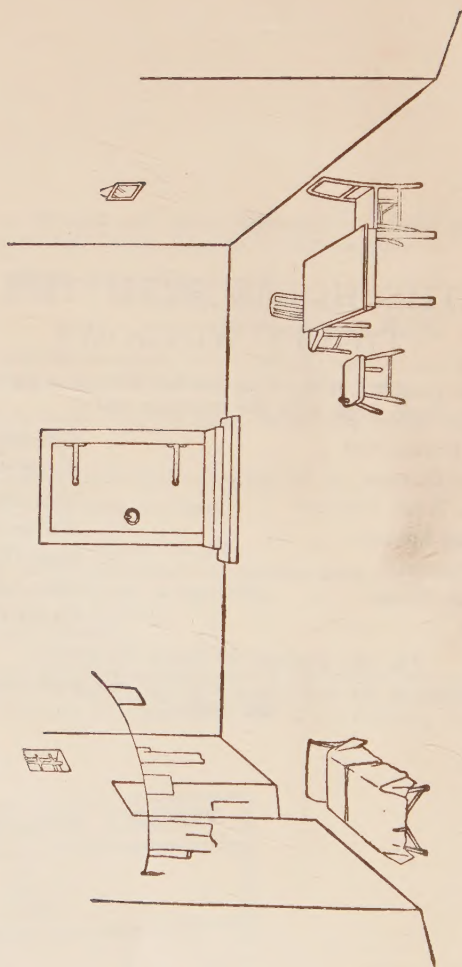
THE HOUSE WITH THE TWISTY WINDOWS

was first produced by the Lena Ashwell Players at the Century Theatre, April, 1926, with the following cast :—

JAMES ROPER, K.C.	.	.	.	.	<i>Kynaston Reeves.</i>
CHARLIE CLIVE	.	.	.	.	<i>Harold Payton.</i>
TERESA, LADY PONTING	.	.	.	.	<i>Olive Walter.</i>
HEATHER SORRELL	.	.	.	.	<i>Mercia Cameron</i>
ANNE SORRELL.	.	.	.	.	<i>Esme Church.</i>
DERRICK MOORE	.	.	.	.	<i>John Killner.</i>
STEPAN	.	.	.	.	<i>Harold Gibson.</i>

The play produced by IRENE HENTSCHEL.

The SCENE is the cellar of a house in Petrograd, during the
"Red Terror."



THE HOUSE WITH THE TWISTY WINDOWS

(The SCENE is the cellar of a house in Petrograd. There is a small grated window high up in the R. wall. A door up R. opens into a second cellar. In the middle of the back wall two or three steps lead up to a heavy, locked door which gives on the staircase. It is about nine o'clock on a night of early autumn. The cellar is lit with electric light—the bulb fitted with an improvised shade—and is furnished with a table down L., with three dilapidated chairs, and a rough camp bed against the wall down R. Upon this CHARLIE CLIVE is lying, in an attitude of abandonment to emotion rather than illness. Some under-garments are hanging on a clothes-line stretched across above the bed. A looking-glass hangs on the L. wall, and in front of this JAMES ROPER, a rather desiccated-looking barrister of 55, is anxiously arranging the scarf which serves him for a collar. He then turns his attention to his shoes, and sitting down R. of the table, surreptitiously tries to polish them with his coat-sleeve. While he is doing this CLIVE sits up. He is a young fellow of 25, whose naturally boyish and open face is furrowed out of all likeness to its ordinary self. He watches for a moment, then bursts out.)

CLIVE. What's the damned good of doing that?

ROPER. I beg your pardon?

CLIVE. I said—what in hell's the use——

ROPER (*nodding towards the inner door*). That door lets everything through directly you raise your voice. You aren't making things easier for the women.

CLIVE. I can't help it, Roper! To see you sitting there polishing your shoes, while Anne—— Oh God! it's enough to drive one crazy!

(He flings himself down on the bed again. The inner door opens cautiously, and LADY PONTING, her head enveloped in a shawl, steals in.)

LADY PONTING. Mr. Roper—how's poor Charlie?

ROPER *(dryly)*. Poor Charlie's just the same as he's been for the last hour, thank you, Lady Ponting.

LADY PONTING. Heather can hear him——

ROPER. I know . . . I know. . . . *(Putting his coat on.)* Nearly time for supper, isn't it?

LADY PONTING *(retreating)*. Oh, I beg your pardon! Were you dressing?

ROPER. Dressing? Hum—if you like to call it dressing——

LADY PONTING. My watch has stopped. *(Exit into the other room.)*

ROPER. Our last timepiece! What on earth does it want to stop for now? We've been shut up here six weeks, and it's gone perfectly——

CLIVE. Everything'll stop to-night, you'll see. The Commissar said they'd keep Anne ten minutes, and she's been away an hour. I never believed in fate before—but I do now. *(His voice rises hysterically.)* Things are right on us happening—happening to Anne——

ROPER *(walking over to him)*. Now look here, Charles, simply because you're engaged to Anne, you're letting your nerves run away with you——

CLIVE. I'm not the only one. We're all as nervy as we can stick.

ROPER. Nervy—nonsense! why should we be? Just look the facts calmly in the face. We're hostages for this ass of an Irishman, Derrick Moore, who's raising Cain with his counter-revolutionary speeches. They've pitched on Anne to question, because she's Moore's cousin, and happens to know Russian——

CLIVE. I wish to God she'd never learnt their foul language!

ROPER. We might as well wish we'd never meddled with their foul legal business—and no doubt Lady Ponting's very sorry she ever took her nieces out to this foul city——

CLIVE. Damned funny, isn't it?—All I hope is they catch Derrick Moore to-night, and flay him alive when they get him! I'd help them—willingly——

ROPER. You won't help Anne by giving way to that sort of beastliness. As to what's happening up there——

CLIVE. I can tell you what's happening. Anne won't give Moore away—nothing on earth'll make Anne speak if she doesn't want to—and they'll . . . (*Starting up.*) Roper, I can't stick it any longer! It's driving me mad—— (*He whips a small bottle out of his pocket.*)

ROPER. What's that? Give it to me——

CLIVE. I don't know . . . Laudanum, I guess——

ROPER. Where did you get it?

CLIVE. Out of their room. (*Uncorks the bottle.*)

ROPER. Give it here . . . (*After a struggle he gets the bottle away from CLIVE, and throws it on the floor.*) You fool! You utter fool!

(*A bell clangs outside.*)

Supper at last! You'll jolly well go and fetch it for us, Charles.

CLIVE. I can't! Look at my hand . . . shaking . . .

ROPER. We shan't weep if you do spill some of the soup.

(*An armed guard opens the c. door.*)

There's Stepan. Go on—quick! (*He almost pushes CLIVE out.*)

(*LADY PONTING enters—a kindly, slightly artificial little widow, skilfully made up to hide the ravages of years and worry combined, her dyed hair and faded black dress arranged with the utmost care.*)

ROPER (*coming down c.*). Wonderful as ever, Lady Ponting! When I get back to England, I shall start

a newspaper called *The Daily Marvel*, solely devoted to you.

LADY PONTING (*delighted*). Oh, but I think it's so important to keep up appearances before these dreadful revolutionaries. (*She pats her hair anxiously.*) You—you don't see anything *unusual* about me, do you?

ROPER. My dear lady, all miracles are unusual. (*Becoming aware of the clothes hanging out to dry.*) Oh dash! . . . Sorry . . . it's all right—but don't look behind you . . . (*Collects the garments, and stuffs them hastily into the bed.*) You didn't notice anything unusual in here, I hope?

LADY PONTING (*mendaciously*). Oh no . . . unless there were some socks hanging out to dry——

ROPER. Socks? . . . hem—yes . . . socks . . . (*He pauses.*) Heather coming in for supper?

LADY PONTING. Presently. The poor child's upset about her sister——

ROPER. It's that young ass, Charles. I've sent him up for the soup. Better behave as if—— Hang it! it is the same as every other night we've spent in this beastly place.

LADY PONTING. But is it? (*She goes up to him.*) Mr. Roper, tell me quick, before Heather comes in. That firing this morning—close by——

ROPER. Some casual attack. We're not far from the fortress, you know.

LADY PONTING. But Anne said it wasn't *that* sort of firing——

ROPER. If she wasn't in danger, I'd say—confound Anne!

LADY PONTING. But you assured me she was not in any danger at all——

ROPER. What?—Sorry, Lady Ponting . . . things get on one's nerves in here——

LADY PONTING. I know . . . But you will tell me what it was?

ROPER. This morning?—Volley-firing.

LADY PONTING. Yes?

ROPER. They were executing prisoners—in batches, I should judge.

LADY PONTING. Oh, but we couldn't hear any—any sounds . . .

ROPER. We could.

(*A pause. LADY PONTING sits down by the table, visibly perturbed.*)

LADY PONTING. Mr. Roper, I'm just wondering what will happen to *us*, if Derrick Moore is never caught——

ROPER. I'd rather not start guessing. (*Thrusts his hands into his pockets, shivering a little.*)

LADY PONTING. You're cold. Do go into our room and get warm.

(*HEATHER SORRELL appears in the doorway, with LADY PONTING's coat over her arm.*)

We've found something to burn in that funny old stove at last—the chair with the broken leg.

ROPER. Hope they don't start counting the furniture! (*To HEATHER.*) May I go in? (*Exit into inner room.*)

(*HEATHER comes slowly up to LADY PONTING—a pretty child, young for her nineteen years, although just now her eyes have a haunted look.*)

HEATHER (*as she helps LADY PONTING into her coat*). No more news of Anne, I suppose?

LADY PONTING (*vaguely, her attention caught by something on the floor*). Not yet . . . no . . . not news exactly . . . (*She picks up the bottle.*)

HEATHER. What is the matter, Auntie?

LADY PONTING. My—my hair-restorer—on the floor! and it's gone—every drop!

HEATHER. Your hair-dye! (*She collapses on the bed, laughing hysterically.*) So that's why Mr. Roper takes so long getting ready for supper!

LADY PONTING. How can you be so ridiculous, Heather? James Roper hasn't a dyed hair in his head—and—oh dear, what's the use of hiding it?—I *know* mine looks like streaky bacon to-night!

HEATHER. Oh, what does it all matter anyway?

LADY PONTING. You don't realize, child—just to-night when everything's going wrong—poor Anne being questioned by those dreadful men, and the firing and everything—that's just the time when one ought to be looking one's own natural self.—Where have you put the tablecloth, dear?

HEATHER (*extracting a piece of newspaper from under the pillow*). It's the only clean piece left.

(LADY PONTING *spreads it on the table.*)

ROPER (*returning*). Can I help you?

LADY PONTING. Oh no, thank you. Go and help poor Charlie. They always give you men such terrible loads to carry down.

(STEPAN *ushers in CLIVE, who carries a tray with a small bowl of soup and five porringers.*)

ROPER. Charles doesn't seem to be exactly staggering. (*Takes the tray and puts the bowls on the table.*) That all they gave you?

CLIVE. Yes . . . (*He leans listlessly against the door, his hands in his pockets.*)

ROPER. Come along, people, and dine. Turtle soup and—er—Charlotte Russe.

(LADY PONTING, HEATHER, and ROPER *seat themselves respectively top, L. and R. of table.*)

HEATHER. Any more news of Anne, Charlie?

CLIVE. No. They wouldn't even let me listen at the door. Stepan threatened to shoot me . . . Wish he'd done it!

ROPER. Go and get the salt, Charles.

LADY PONTING. It's up on the stove, Charlie, to be out of the way of the rats.

(CLIVE *rouses himself with an effort, and slouches into the inner room.*)

HEATHER. How frightfully nervy you all are to-night!

LADY PONTING. My dear, I feel perfectly calm, I

assure you—except for that little upset . . . (*Her hands stray to her hair.*)

ROPER. Never had a fit of nerves in my life!

HEATHER. It takes different people different ways. I can see you're trying to cover things up all the while. It's much better to face them.

ROPER. There's nothing definite to face—that's the whole trouble. (*Calling.*) Salt forward, Charles!

CLIVE (*entering*). What?

ROPER. Didn't you get the salt?

CLIVE. I didn't look.

(ROPER starts up impatiently and goes into the farther room.)

(*Accusingly, to HEATHER.*) Where've you put Anne's photograph?

HEATHER. I put it away . . .

CLIVE. That's it. You're frightened too.

(ROPER returns with the salt, and seats himself a little away from the table.)

HEATHER. Why are you leaving Auntie and me to dine alone in state?

ROPER. Ask Charles. That's all he brought.

CLIVE. I can't touch the stuff! (*Seats himself on the bottom of the bed.*)

ROPER. Oh well, I'll eat up your share with pleasure. (*Falls to.*)

LADY PONTING. I can't think why they sent up so much less than usual.

CLIVE. Can't you? Same reason as everything else.

ROPER. Ten to one Stepan didn't give any reason.

HEATHER. I want to hear what he said, Charlie—the exact words . . .

CLIVE (*slowly*). If you really want to know—I told him it was only half rations, and he said—"It's all one: it won't matter to you by the morning."

(*There is a moment's dead silence.*)

ROPER. Oh come—I take it, it means we're going to be released.

CLIVE. Think so?

ROPER (*starting up*). Confound you, I do think so. What else could it mean?

HEATHER. I should think it might mean . . . something quite different.

LADY PONTING. Mr. Roper—Heather darling—you haven't finished your soup—

HEATHER. I don't want any more—no, really, Auntie— (*Rises.*)

LADY PONTING (*producing a flask*). Would you like a teeny drop of brandy instead?

HEATHER (*impatiently*). Why should I? We're not all going to be shot at once, I suppose?

LADY PONTING. Dear child, how impetuous you are! —Mr. Roper—a little spot now—

ROPER. Better stiffen Charles up, or he'll get on everybody else's nerves as well as his own.

CLIVE (*starting up*). Listen! What's that?

ROPER. Only Stepan coming for the tray—

CLIVE. I can't stand this any longer! (*Goes up to the door.*) I'm going to find Anne—I'll make him take me—

ROPER. You know perfectly well they won't let you through. (*Interposes between CLIVE and the door. CLIVE tries to push him away.*) Behave yourself, man! Anne's not the only woman in the world.

HEATHER. There's someone with Stepan—

ROPER. The Commissar!

(*All stiffen involuntarily. The door opens, and ANNE SORRELL enters, alone.*)

CLIVE. Anne! (*They surround her, all talking at once.*)

ROPER	} (<i>together</i>). {	What sort of time have you had?
HEATHER		Were they rough to you?
LADY PONTING		Could you understand a word they said?
CLIVE		Anne! . . . Anne! . . . Anne! . . .

ANNE (*laughing*). Yes—no . . . Yes—no . . . I can't hear a word!

CLIVE (*his arm round her*). What's it matter? What does anything matter? She's safe—safe and back!

ANNE. Yes, yes, Charlie, but do let me sit down a minute. You can go on holding my hand. (*She sinks into a chair.*) Ouf! I'm tired of standing. I believe they think we're all Olympic athletes in England.

CLIVE. I don't see how you can joke.

ANNE. Oh Charlie, it's such a relief! I'm certain revolutionaries have no sense of humour.

HEATHER. Oh, never mind them——

LADY PONTING. Tell us *all* about it, dearest.

ROPER. Were they decent to you on the whole?

ANNE. Well, they weren't actually rough, except once——

CLIVE. Once!

ANNE. Don't look so savage, Charlie.—You see, I've been trying to get to the bottom of it all. I've found out one thing. The Commissar's had a bad fright—and he's apt to lose his head and shoot when he's frightened. He's scared stiff of Derrick Moore. He's the most dangerous enemy of the revolution in Petrograd, and yet he's so evasive that they didn't even know him by sight until—— (*She jumps up.*) Oh, I don't know why we're discussing all this. It's news, people, news! (*She pauses dramatically.*) We're going to be released to-morrow morning.

ROPER. To-morrow? Oh, by Jove!—— (*Fingers his scarf uncomfortably.*)

CLIVE (*kissing ANNE's hand*). I've got all I want here, thanks.

LADY PONTING. Released! . . . just as we are? (*She pats her hair.*) I *should* have liked a little time——

HEATHER. Time! You've had six weeks. You're the most ungrateful lot I ever saw. Do you realize we're going to be set free, able to go where we like——

ANNE. England for me! They've made it clear they won't put anything in our way——

CLIVE. Anne darling, what d'you say to being married directly we land?

HEATHER. Oh, not *directly*—you must give me time to get a proper bridesmaid's dress—

ANNE (*suddenly grave*). This is frightfully good news for us, but I don't think we ought to be talking about weddings. You see, Derrick Moore's been caught.

HEATHER. What—to-night?

(ANNE *nods*.)

ROPER. Caught him at last, have they? By Jove! I suppose that's why they're letting us out?

ANNE. Yes; they packed me off as soon as they heard he'd been brought in. I hadn't even time to see him—

CLIVE. Well, thank Heaven they've got him, Anne! I can't help it—the fellow's been asking for it . . .

ANNE. I suppose you realize that he'll be shot to-morrow?

(*The women exclaim in dismay.*)

That's not all. This is the only prison accommodation they have. They're putting him in here for the night.

CLIVE. Whew! The condemned cell!

ROPER. Nonsense, Clive! I shouldn't in the least wonder if he's got some fantastic last-minute escape up his sleeve. He's quite capable of bringing it off, you know.

LADY PONTING. Oh, I do hope so! What's the poor dear man like, Mr. Roper?

ROPER. The poor dear man is one of those muscular giants who do incredible things on the films—

HEATHER. Please don't joke about it! It's all very well for us—we're being set free—

ROPER. Yes; it isn't a lively situation for him exactly.

LADY PONTING. We must all be very, very nice to him. (*The others suppress an hysterical inclination to laugh.*)

(*The c. door is thrown open, and STEPAN appears.*)

ROPER. Come to fetch the tray? Here you are, Comrade. Last time, eh?

STEPAN. No. Commissar want Comrade Anne Sorrell.

CLIVE. *What!*

STEPAN. Comrade Anne Sorrell. (*Pointing to ANNE.*) That one.

(CLIVE starts forward.)

ROPER (*pushing him back*). It's all right, old boy. (*To STEPAN.*) A formal order of release, eh?

STEPAN. No. More question. (*He grins.*) Commissar angry.

ROPER. Angry! He's got Derrick Moore safe, hasn't he?—Look here, what does the Commissar want to find out?

(STEPAN looks at him stupidly.)

How on earth is one to make the fellow understand?

ANNE. He understands you all right, but he's had orders not to speak. Please, don't worry, dear people. I expect they want me to identify Derrick—

CLIVE. You're not going back there again, darling. Roper and I are going.—Come on, Comrade, march us off.

STEPAN. You no good. Not answer questions. (*To ANNE.*) Come on quick, or I shoot.

CLIVE. You beast! You infernal beast!

(*Springs at STEPAN, who throws him off violently, and has dragged ANNE out and shut the door before he can recover himself. He rushes to the door and throws his weight against it. ROPER grapples with him, and forces him into the other room.*)

HEATHER. Anne! Oh, do you think she'll ever come back again? (*She throws herself into LADY PONTING'S arms.*)

LADY PONTING. Why, of course. She's only got to identify Derrick—

HEATHER. She won't! She's as firm as a rock.—

Auntie, it may sound revolting, but I don't care two-pence-halfpenny what becomes of Derrick when I think of you and Anne. Fear debases one; I know it does!

LADY PONTING. My dear, we mustn't let ourselves get panicky; it upsets the judgment. Look at poor Charlie in there——

(ROPER returns.)

How is he, Mr. Roper?

ROPER. Charles? Like a collapsed air-ball. I told him to join us again when he could behave himself. No use giving way—— (*As HEATHER drops into a chair, hiding her face.*) Come, Heather my dear, we must hope for the best, you know . . .

HEATHER. The Commissar's angry. Anne says he shoots when he's angry . . .

ROPER. 'Pon my soul, I'm glad they're shoving Moore in here. Big burly fellow—just the sort to stiffen you up if you need it——

LADY PONTING. Don't we all need it?

ROPER. I'm not aware of showing any signs of collapse—and as for you, you're a standing miracle——

(*All at once, LADY PONTING'S overwrought nerves give way, and she bursts into tears. ROPER, much distressed, pats her shoulder soothingly.*)

There, there, my dear . . . six weeks of it—enough to get on anyone's nerves . . . Oh dash it! Isn't there anything one can give her?

(*HEATHER absently hands him the hair-dye bottle from the table.*)

Take a little of this . . . I don't know what it is, but it came out of your room—oh Lord! what's the matter now?

(*LADY PONTING has given one glance at the bottle and broken into hysterical laughter, followed by HEATHER as she takes in the situation.*)

Good God, what am I to do with 'em all? I wish to heaven Moore would come and take 'em in hand!

(As if in answer to his wish, the door is thrown open, STEPAN pushes DERRICK MOORE into the room, and slams the door behind him again.)

HEATHER *(starting up)*. Derry—you! *(Runs to him, and takes both his hands.)* You of all people! Why, it's like a fairy-tale!

LADY PONTING. With a happy ending, I hope?

(MOORE'S tired face relaxes into a whimsical smile. He is a man of 40, small and fragile-looking, indubitably Irish in speech and appearance, but so remote from the vision he has conjured up that ROPER can only stare dumbfounded. He wears an overcoat over evening dress, but has lost his hat and appears to have been roughly handled.)

ROPER. Excuse me—but who the deuce is this?

MOORE. The gentleman seems surprised. Wasn't he by way of expecting me?

ROPER. You're not Derrick Moore——

HEATHER. Oh yes, he is! Mr. Roper—my cousin, Derrick Moore, sometimes called the Irish Hans Andersen. He used to keep us all quiet for hours when we were little——

ROPER. Indeed?

MOORE. Only with fairy-tales.

HEATHER. Not admitted in court, Derry: Mr. Roper's a K.C. You know my aunt, Lady Ponting—and Charlie Clive's in the next room——

ROPER. One moment—am I to understand that there are actually *two* persons of the name of Derrick Moore?

HEATHER. Yes—cousins. We call this one Derry, and that one Dick. They're not much alike really——

MOORE. No—one of us goes in for revolutions, and the other for fairy-tales——

HEATHER. This is the other.—Derry dear, it's lovely

to meet you again after all these years! Evening dress too—we're all so sick of our grubby old clothes.—Aunt Teresa—doesn't he look splendid?

MOORE. Ah well, I don't feel as splendid as I look. The last few hours have been a bit of a strain. But I'm through now. (*He comes down to the table.*) I'm afraid my unexpected arrival has given you all a bit of a shock.

ROPER. Seems an odd coincidence, to say the least of it.

MOORE. It wasn't just what you'd call a coincidence. You see, when I was rejected for the army, my cousin Dick's wife begged me to get into Russia and look up Dick, who hadn't been heard of for ten months. I got attached to the Consulate here—and arrested a week later on the strength of my name.

HEATHER. Mr. Roper—Aunt Teresa—it's as clear as daylight! They suspect they've got hold of the wrong man—that's why they're questioning Anne.—Anne's seen you, hasn't she, Derry? (*He nods.*)

ROPER. Can she prove your identity?

MOORE. Oh yes—she can prove my identity. I'm expecting to be—(*he hesitates*)—released in about half an hour.

ROPER. The deuce you are! Sorry, but your capture has placed us in a pretty awkward fix. Ten to one the Commissar will wreak his disappointment on us.

MOORE. Indeed I'm grieved for you all, but I'm glad they gave Dick a miss. The man's a firebrand, but he's got a family depending on him . . .

ROPER. Hum . . . you can afford to be sentimental. We've got to look some very unpleasant facts in the face.

MOORE. Facts, did ye say?

ROPER. Yes, sir—facts. I imagine it's a commodity you don't deal much in.

(MOORE pauses, then says gently.)

MOORE. May we hear your facts, Mr. Roper?

(Before ROPER can answer, CHARLIE CLIVE bursts into the room, with a face like chalk.)

CLIVE. Anne! . . . They're torturing Anne!

HEATHER. Charlie, Charlie—no——

CLIVE. I tell you they are. I heard a scream——

LADY PONTING (to ROPER). Jim—go to her—force the door——

ROPER. By Jove! I'll have a try for it——

MOORE. Roper—stop! Can't you tell them it's pure imagination? None of us heard anything.

ROPER. How can one tell? This place is full of noises——

LADY PONTING. Yes, yes—voices . . . and foot-steps . . .

HEATHER. Oh, I can't bear it! I can't live if it's true!

MOORE. I'm certain it isn't true, Heather—as certain as that I stand here.

ROPER. How the hell do you know? You're getting clear of it all. Anything might be true here——

MOORE. Yes—if you stop to imagine it.

CLIVE. Listen—there it is again——

(A pause of strained attention.)

LADY PONTING. I can't hear anything . . .

ROPER. Nor I.

CLIVE. You don't care—not one of you! I shall go mad! . . . (He flings himself down on the bed, his fingers pressed to his ears.)

HEATHER. He did hear something—look at him . . .

LADY PONTING. There . . . now . . . very faint and far away . . .

HEATHER. Oh, if one only *knew*——

ROPER. You're right. The worst certainty's better than this suspense.

MOORE. Yes—till you get it. (He turns to HEATHER.) Shall I tell you what you heard just now? Nothing in the world but your own terrors calling.

HEATHER. Charlie heard more than that——

MOORE (*smiling a little*). His terror called the loudest.

LADY PONTING. Perhaps Mr. Moore's right. We've been shut up in here so long that we begin to imagine things . . .

MOORE (*whimsically*). The House with the Twisty Windows! Sure, you're looking through them all the while.

ROPER. And what the deuce are you looking through?

MOORE. The plain glass.

(ROPER *turns away impatiently*.)

LADY PONTING. What does he mean, Heather dear?

HEATHER. Oh, I don't know . . . I can't think of anything but Anne——

MOORE. Anne's safe, Heather—I'm certain of it.

CLIVE. How do you know? What's it to you?

MOORE. Perhaps there are times when one's allowed to know things.

CLIVE. That's all moonshine! (*Flinging himself down again*.)

LADY PONTING. Mr. Moore must forgive us—we're all on edge. It's distraction we need—something to take us out of ourselves . . .

HEATHER. Do you want Derry to tell us fairy-tales? (*Her face lights up*.) Why, of course! That's the very thing he came here for. (*She takes MOORE's arm coaxingly*.) Just a little one, Derry—to keep us quiet till Anne comes back——

MOORE (*agitated*). No, no, Heather, it can't be done—not now . . .

HEATHER. But it's now we all need it.

MOORE. Heather darling, I'll do anything but that.

HEATHER. But why—why——

MOORE. Can't you guess it's a difficult thing to be telling fairy-tales—under the circumstances?

LADY PONTING. But we're not in any *immediate* danger——

ROPER. May I say that I really don't see how all this is going to help?

HEATHER. Of course you don't. *You never sat on his knee, drinking in every word he spoke——*

ROPER. I! Certainly not.

HEATHER. Don't take any notice of him, Derry. Begin quick, before we've time to start fancying things

MOORE (*accepting the situation*). Very well, Heather alanna—though it's hard spinning spider's webs to grown-up people.

HEATHER. Oh, but we'll go back for you, Derry. (*Shaking her hair loose.*) There! We're in the school-room, and it's nearly bedtime—— (*She nestles up to MOORE, as he seats himself on the table.*)

MOORE. There's room for another, Roper.

HEATHER. Jim's too old for fairy-tales. He's just got into trousers.

ROPER. Oh, don't mind me. (*Turning his back upon them.*)

LADY PONTING. May I be a little girl too? (*Seating herself on the other side of HEATHER.*) Charlie dear—the light——

CLIVE (*sitting up*). What?

HEATHER. Put the light out, Charlie.

CLIVE. Why? I'm going to wait up—for Anne . . .

MOORE. We're all waiting up for Anne. But if we let the moonlight in, maybe *they'll* come in with it. Isn't that the switch by the door?

(*CLIVE turns the light off, then sits apathetically down on the bed. The moonlight falls through the grated window, throwing its shadow on the floor. For a moment MOORE sits lost in his thoughts.*)

HEATHER. Derry—begin. Tell us one I know.

MOORE. One you know? (*He casts about in his memory, then begins in his soft Irish voice.*) There's a house in the Macree Hills they say was built by the fairies——

ROPER. Fairies!

MOORE. It's likely you never saw them—but anyway there was one of them living in the water-barrel at the

bottom of the potato-patch, and the folks said Larry O'Hara was daft to buy the house—though ne'er a bit could he tell about it after, except that there was something queer with the windows of it——

HEATHER. I know! I know! It's "The House with the Twisty Windows"! Derry dear, I've never forgotten it.

MOORE. Heather dear, if you interrupt, I'll lose the hang of it altogether.

(HEATHER nestles up to him contritely.)

Twisty! You may say so. In one place the glass would be waving like a gleaming river—then spiral up to a whirlpool in the middle, and change before your eyes just as if it was living. Down in a corner you'd see a light of blue like a pleasant lake, with the panes above it all crinkled into black and grey mountains . . . and then again deep as if it had no bottom, like the depth of a still, green forest. . . . And for awhile Larry stood gazing with all the pleasure in the world at the great country he could see through the twisty windows; and then and there he set off to look for the pleasant lakes and hills he'd visioned in the glass. Long he walked—and found nothing but the black and yellow bogs and the dun mountains; and in the evening he came home and dug his potato-patch.

ROPER. Wise man!

MOORE. Not so wise neither—for the twisty windows showed him a different world outside of him every day—and many a time he'd be off on a tramp looking for a rainbow or a fleet of white ships sailing, and come home full of disappointment.—But at last one fine day when he happened to look out, the window-glass ran all purple and black and full of strange, writhing colours: and he took a great fear and stayed at home a whole week, scared to put a foot out of doors. On the seventh day that Leprechaun I told you of——

ROPER. Leprechaun? What the devil's that?

HEATHER. I thought you weren't listening . . .

MOORE. They're well known in those parts, though

they wouldn't be talking about them—and anyway this one felt a queer kindness for Larry, since he'd eaten up all the best of his potatoes. So when he begins telling him of the evil signs in the windows, the Leprechaun gives a great laugh, and a mist comes up all over the room . . . and when it vanished away, the twisty windows had vanished with it, and Larry found himself looking through the clear glass.

LADY PONTING. I wonder what he saw?

MOORE. He saw . . . he saw what was before him.
(*Pauses.*)

HEATHER. Go on, Derry.

MOORE (*rousing himself with an effort*). It was on the third evening after that, the Leprechaun came out as dusk fell, and finds Larry O'Hara searching in his garden like a mad thing.—“Arrah!” says he, “what are ye looking for now?”—“Divil a bit do I know,” says Larry—“but it's gospel truth that ever since the clear windows was put in the house, I've seemed to miss something I'm always seeking for—though what it is I can't tell” . . . and with that his whole loss comes back to him, and he cries out sudden and loud, “Give me back my twisty windows—for there's *Hope* lies behind them!”

(*A moment's silence.*)

LADY PONTING. Thank you—thank you for your fairy-tale.

MOORE. And me that thought I was telling a true story all the while!

ROPER. All very well for you to hope . . .

HEATHER (*coming out of a dream*). Derry, may I speak to you—just for one minute——

CLIVE. Here, I say—let's have the light on.

HEATHER. Oh, not yet! Derry belongs to the moonlight.

MOORE. Not now, Heather. Moonlight's for children—and fairy-tales.

HEATHER. But there's something I want to tell you . . . all to ourselves, Derry——

LADY PONTING. Yes, yes, of course. Charlie—Mr. Roper—come into my room and get warm. Look what a blaze! The fairies have kept the fire burning for us.

(She almost pushes ROPER and CLIVE into the next room.)

HEATHER. I believe Auntie thinks we're all in the nursery still! *(She looks very childlike herself as she comes up to him.)* Derry dear, may I really tell you something?

MOORE *(with forced lightness)*. Bedtime confidences again?

HEATHER. I don't think you realize that I'm nineteen—

MOORE. Yes, and I'm forty.

HEATHER. That doesn't matter. There's no difference between us at all really. You see, you'll never grow up—

MOORE. It's true I haven't much time left.

HEATHER. And it makes me feel I can say anything to you. *(Coming closer.)* Derry—I've something very serious to tell you—

MOORE *(turning away)*. Heather—no! Not now, please, Heather—

HEATHER. Yes—now, while we're still together. Oh Derry, I'm glad they're setting you free, but I can't help knowing that anything might happen to me before to-morrow morning, and it gives me a kind of right to speak—

MOORE. Ah, but I mustn't hear you . . .

HEATHER. Yes, yes, you must. *(With great simplicity.)* I love you, Derry—I love you more than I've ever loved anybody in my life. I suppose I always did—but to-night, while you were talking, I found it out, and I—I had to tell you before you went. . . . *(As he is silent.)* Haven't you got any answer for me? You see, we may never meet again. I might get shot, like those other prisoners—

MOORE. Don't, Heather!

HEATHER. Then if it's all right—won't you kiss me, like you used to do before I went to bed?

MOORE (*coming quickly to her and taking her hands*). My dear little girl, I'll be doing you the best service if I tell you the truth. You're making altogether too much of a moonlight night and a fit of nerves——

HEATHER. Nerves!

MOORE. They're running away with you, Heather dear, and you not knowing it.

HEATHER. Oh . . . (*She clenches her hands.*)

MOORE. That's better. Now you'll be angry with me.

HEATHER. I am—*very* angry——

MOORE. Then kiss and make it up.

HEATHER. Oh, you're treating me like a child . . .

MOORE. That's just all you are. (*He kisses her lightly on the forehead. All at once, her arms go round him, and she clings to him.*)

HEATHER. Derry, Derry—don't go . . . don't leave me——

MOORE. *Heather!* (*He holds her close.*) I didn't mean to tell you, but you know now . . .

(*A confused sound of voices is heard off, outside. MOORE and HEATHER draw apart, as LADY PONTING enters, followed by the two men.*)

LADY PONTING. Those dreadful voices! Turn the light on, Charlie——

(*As CLIVE turns the light on, STEPAN enters.*)

CLIVE. Anne! Where's Anne . . .

ROPER. Well, Comrade, which of us have you come for now?

STEPAN. That one. (*Pointing to MOORE.*)

ROPER (*to MOORE*). Proved your identity, has she? You're lucky.

MOORE (*to STEPAN*). Now?—at once?

ROPER. Better get into safety while you can. They sound pretty clamorous.

MOORE. Yes; I'm ready.

ROPER. Good luck to you then! (*He adds with an effort.*) Don't think I'm grudging you anything.

MOORE. That's good of you.

LADY PONTING (*taking his hand*). Good-bye, Mr. Moore. We'll still go on digging in your fairy garden——

MOORE. May you find everything you look for! (*He clasps HEATHER'S hand for a moment, then goes out, followed by STEPAN.*)

ROPER. So that's that! We're left to face the facts, while that fellow gets off scot-free with his fairy-tales!

LADY PONTING. Still, I'm glad you gave him your good wishes——

ROPER. 'Fraid I wasn't very successful in concealing my feelings. (*Coming to her.*) It's you I'm thinking of, my dear—what's to become of you——

LADY PONTING. Yes—we're all thinking of each other, and perhaps it makes us just a little bit—selfish.

(*The door opens, and ANNE stumbles in, pale and exhausted, almost into the arms of CLIVE.*)

CLIVE. You, Anne—you!

ANNE (*disengaging herself from his clasp*). Don't, Charlie—not just now . . .

ROPER. How on earth did you manage to get in without Stepan?

ANNE. He left the door unlocked—didn't you notice?

ROPER. Unlocked! (*He goes up to make sure.*)

ANNE. Yes . . . we're free to go . . . (*Drops into a chair.*)

CLIVE (*throwing himself down beside her*). Anne—you're hurt—you're ill! Anne—what have they been doing to you?

ANNE (*almost fiercely*). Nothing! I tell you they haven't touched me. Can't you think of anybody else? Can't any of you think of anybody but yourselves?

CLIVE. It's you we're thinking of——

ANNE (*half to herself*). I've done right, I suppose . . . I've done what Derry told me . . .

HEATHER. Derry!

ANNE. We met—after I was called back. Didn't he explain? No—I suppose you'd have stopped him——

LADY PONTING. Can't you tell us what you've been doing, dear?

ANNE. Answering questions—about Derry. They don't know him by sight—they thought they'd got hold of the wrong man——

ROPER. So they had.

ANNE. Yes. But I had to persuade them that they'd got hold of the right man. Derry made me. He said it was Dick's only chance of getting out of Russia——

ROPER. But this fellow—Derry you call him—he got away . . .

ANNE. No: he's in Dick's place now.

ROPER. What d'you mean?

(He is answered by a sharp word of command outside, followed by the sound of a volley. HEATHER collapses in LADY PONTING'S arms.)

CURTAIN.

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